

JAIME'S SUSHI PREP PRIMER

Overview

- 1) Sushi propaganda – why it's so great!
- 2) Procuring ingredients
- 3) Rice preparation – the hardest part
- 4) Toppings and fillings
- 5) Assembly: Sashimi, Nigiri, Maki
- 6) Glossary

1) Sushi propaganda

Sushi is such a delightful food because it is fresh, healthy, and delicious! It has become extremely popular in the US in recent years – \$36,000,000 in sushi seaweed was sold last year alone. The high price of sushi at restaurants belies the stringent requirements for healthful preparation... the fish must be scrupulously fresh, the preparation area extremely clean, and the chef typically trained for years before running a sushi bar at a restaurant. However it is practical in an international city such as Boston to make affordable sushi oneself, with a bit of practice and some common sense. Sashimi grade fish (the only kind you EVER want to make raw sushi with) is readily available at specialty markets, as well as the other ingredients (seaweed, ginger, wasabi) and accessories. This primer is intended as an introduction to basic sushi preparation, while more advanced recipes can be found at bookstores or learned from professional sushi chefs.

2) Procuring Ingredients

Most of the ingredients for sushi can be bought at a regular grocery store – so you have no excuses for not making it at will! You will need, at minimum:

Short-grained rice

Wasabi powder

Pickled ginger (gari or shoga)

Nori (dried sheets of seaweed)

Sushi vinegar – for flavoring the rice

Soy sauce

Any vegetables of your choice – typically cucumber, avocado, and a bit of lemon

Hardware:

Rice paddle

Bamboo rolling mat, if you want maki (rolled sushi)

These are definitely available in the “international foods” section of the local Star Market (veggies of course in their proper place). Most of these will serve you for many-a-sushi-meal, because you only use a bit each time.

Then the star of the sushi menu is the fresh fish. If you are squeamish about eating raw fish, you do have several options! Shrimp is always great, and of course is easily available at the grocery store. As is crab, or imitation crab, which is available only in cooked form. Both shrimp and crab should never be eaten raw. Smoked salmon, for example Norwegian style, is another readily available sushi filling – it's especially good in hand rolls.

If raw and exotic is your flavor, then you will need to seek out a specialty Japanese grocery store. Fortunately here in Boston there are several! The one that I always visit, and trust immensely, is Kotobukiya in Porter Exchange. They have numerous kinds of sashimi-grade fish (the only kind you ever want to eat raw) as well as unagi (cooked eel – my favorite) and all the accessories you want. Directions to Kotobukiya are attached at the end of the primer. Let me know if you find other Japanese grocers!

3) Sushi Rice

This is the most difficult part of sushi making, other than actually finding the ingredients you need. Plan on about 1.5 hours for preparation. One easy way out of doing this is to buy cooked sushi rice from a sushi restaurant, which they will usually sell for pretty cheap (\$2.00 for a lunch-sized portion). But doing it yourself is divine.

You will need a short-grained rice to make sushi rice. Types “designed” for sushi are available, but any short-grained Asian rice should suffice. Long- and medium-grained rice are not suitable for sushi because they are drier types, and won't stick to itself well enough to form nigiri or maki.

Step 1. Ingredients. This recipe makes 5 cups of sushi rice, which is enough for 10 maki, 6 Inside-out California rolls, OR 40 nigiri-sushi. Raw short-grain rice expands a lot when it cooks, so it's easy to cook way too much... be careful! Additional note: Sushi rice cannot be refrigerated (it won't stick the next day) so make about as much as you think you'll need.

- 2 cups short-grain rice
- 2 cups plus 6 tsp cold water (if you are using a rice-cooker, then use the quantity specified in your user's manual)
- ½ cup sushi vinegar
- cold water for washing rice

- large bowl for washing rice
- strainer – optional if you're cooking in a rice cooker
- medium-sized heavy saucepan or an electric rice cooker
- clean towel
- rice paddle (bamboo or plastic)
- large non-metallic platter for mixing the rice

fan (bamboo, electric, etc.) for cooling the rice quickly

Step 2. Wash rice. Rice is almost always shipped coated in corn starch, glucose, or at the very least still contains rice flour from the polishing process. It is imperative to wash this away, lest your rice come out mushy and odd-tasting. Soak the rice in a bowl of cold water for ~1 minute, to loosen the coating. Drain the water away (either with a strainer or with your hand) and refresh the water, stirring with your hands. Keep repeating the rinse for 5-10 minutes until the water drains away mostly clear (it's pretty much impossible to ever get it totally clear.) Drain the rice in a strainer for 30-60 minutes to get all the water out, and also the rice will soften a bit. If you're using a rice cooker, then you can leave the rice in the bowl with a bit of water, because measuring the water is not as crucial (usually it involves just adding water up to a line inside the cooker.) Again, let it soak for 30-60 minutes to soften the grains.

Step 3. Cook it! There are two options.

A) Stove-top preparation. Add the well-drained rice and the proper amount of water to a heavy saucepan. If you are going to be scaling your recipe up or down, then you need to change the size of your pan too. Cover tightly. Do not lift the lid at ANY point during cooking or the steam will escape and the rice won't cook properly. These instructions are for a gas range. To prevent overcooking on an electric range, change heating temperatures by switching burners, rather than adjusting the heat of the same burner. Also, if you are not using a heavy saucepan, reduce the cooking times by watching for the signs of rice steaming, boiling (jiggling lid), and the rice drying (crackling sound.)

Place over medium-high heat until the rice steams (~10 minutes). Turn the heat to high and cook 2 minutes. You may notice a white foam around the lid and the lid jiggling up and down. Next, reduce the heat to medium and cook another 5 minutes, until the foam stops and you hear a crackling sound. Turn off the heat, and let stand, covered, for another 15 minutes, as the rice steams. After rice is finished steaming, remove the cover and, using the bamboo paddle, fluff the rice. Then wrap the cover in a cloth towel and return cover to pot. Let stand another 15 minutes.

B) Rice cooker. Just follow the instructions that came with your cooker.

Step 4. Seasoning the rice. With the rice paddle, gently spread out the hot rice into your platter or large bowl. The large surface area is necessary so the rice can cool very quickly, and the material must not be metal, else the vinegar will react with it, creating a bad taste.

As the steam is escaping, sprinkle the sushi vinegar over the rice, and with the paddle toss the rice with the vinegar. I prefer a bit less vinegar than this recipe calls for (1/2 cup vinegar to 2 cups uncooked rice) but it's a matter of taste. Immediately start fanning the rice to cool it – this helps make it sticky. A bamboo fan or a piece of cardboard work equally well. Also an electric fan near an open window can be great!

Cover the rice loosely with a clean wet towel and let it stand 15 minutes, or until at room temperature. Keep the rice covered with a damp towel if it's not to be used immediately.